



Implementation of Visual Brand and Content Strategy Through Instagram Feed to Enhance Branding Effectiveness: A Case Study of Papin Donuts MSME, Malang

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ABSTRACT

Instagram is a social media platform that MSMEs can use to build their branding and reach consumers. Papin Donuts has been using Instagram as a promotional tool; however, the implementation of its visual brand identity and content strategy has not been consistent, resulting in suboptimal branding. This study aims to design a visual brand identity and content strategy for the Instagram feed using Affinity by Canva and to analyze their effectiveness in enhancing branding at Papin Donuts. This study employed the Action Research method based on the Kemmis and McTaggart model, consisting of planning, action, observation, and reflection stages. Data were collected through observation, interviews, documentation, and questionnaires. The analysis was conducted using the EPIC Model and supported by engagement rate data. The results showed that the visual brand design consisted of a consistent logo, color palette, typography, and feed templates, while the content strategy included content pillars, content calendars, brand voice, and copywriting. Consumer evaluation results showed scores of 4.33 for empathy, 4.11 for persuasion, 4.19 for impact, and 4.30 for communication, which fell into the effective to highly effective categories. The average engagement rate of 7% was classified as very good. In conclusion, visual brand and content strategy are effective in supporting the branding of Papin Donuts through Instagram. Both elements complement each other and cannot be separated, as their integration strengthens brand identity, delivers consistent brand messages, and increases audience engagement. Consistent implementation of visual brand and content strategy helps MSMEs build stronger branding on social media.

Keywords: Branding, Content Strategy, EPIC Model, Visual Brand

1. INTRODUCTION

In the current area of digitalization, the rapid development of information technology has significantly reshaped consumer behavior, particularly in the culinary industry. Purchase decision no longer determined solely by product taste, but are increasingly influenced by the visual perception and brand image built through digital media, especially through the photos, video, and content design presented on social media. Instagram, as a visual-based platform, has become a strategic channel micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) to introduce products, build brand image, and reach consumers more broadly (Kotler & Keller, 2016). The intensity of social media use has also produced a condition of digital noise, in which audiences are exposed to a large volume of brand content simultaneously; content without a strong and consistent visual character tends to struggle to capture attention, weakening brand messages and reducing audience engagement (Daming & Arnama, 2022; Wheeler & Meyerson, 2024). Content strategy operationalizes a consistent visual identity into practice by considering marketing objectives, audience characteristics, and platform features, so that content is not only visually appealing but also capable of building interaction and engagement (Tuten & Solomon, 2018).

The competitive pressure faced by culinary MSMEs is illustrated by growth of the sector in Malang City, where the local Cooperative, Industry, and Trade Office recorded 24,108 culinary MSME units in 2025,

concentrated mainly in the Sukun, Lowokwaru, and Blimbing sub-districts. Such a high number of competitors indicates that rivalry no longer depends solely on product quality but also on the ability of a brand to build a typical digital image. Papin Donuts is one such culinary MSME, operating since 2022 and known for its bomboloni made with natural sourdough yeast, offering a softer texture than comparable products. The business promotes its products through Car Free Day events, MSME bazaars, and the Instagram account @papindonuts.id, relying mainly on word of mouth and unplanned social media uploads rather than a standardized visual guideline.

An audit of the @papindonuts.id account showed that although Papin Donuts already possesses core visual identity assets, including a logo, a navy and yellow color palette, and Poppins/ Lato typography these elements were not applied consistently across feed uploads. The feed was dominated by product photographs and event documentation with varying visual styles, without a defined layout, template, or grid pattern. The account's average engagement rate stood at only 3.47%, which falls in the "Good" category according to Dealls (2025), but the result was inconsistent across uploads. Instagram Insight further showed that the account's followers are dominated by the 25-34 age group (52.6%) and are most active on Mondays, Fridays, and Saturdays between 06:00 p.m. and 09:00 p.m., indicating an untapped opportunity to strengthen digital branding through more structured visual and content planning.

Affinity by Canva was selected as the primary design tool in this study because of its ability to combine photo editing and illustration in a single lightweight application, produce sharp, print ready output even on mid-range devices, and remain free of subscription cost after its acquisition by Canva (Nugroho, 2025). On this basis, the present study was conducted under the title "Implementation Visual Brand and Content Strategy Through Instagram Feed to Enhance Branding Effectiveness: A Case Study of Papin Donuts MSME, Malang", with the following questions: (1) how are the visual brand and content strategy for Papin Donuts designed using Affinity by Canva; (2) how effective is the resulting visual brand in strengthening the branding of Papin Donuts; (3) how effective is the resulting content strategy in strengthening the branding of Papin Donuts in Malang City.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section reviews the concepts of digital and social media marketing, visual brand and visual identity, content strategy, branding effectiveness, and the EPIC Model and engagement rate as the analytical framework of this study, followed by a review of relevant previous research.

2.1. Digital Marketing and Social Media Branding

Marketing is social and managerial process of creating, communicating, and delivering value to customers while managing customer relationships to benefit the organization and its stakeholders (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Digital marketing extends this process by using digital technology to build interactive, two-way relationships with consumers across online platforms; compared with conventional methods, it is more cost efficient, reaches a wider market without geographical limits, produces measurable results, and enables more specific targeting based on demographics and consumer habits (Digdowiseiso & Ria, 2023; Kotler & Armstrong, 2018). Within this landscape, social media marketing uses social platforms to create, communicate, and exchange valuable content in order to build relationships between a brand its audience, strengthen brand awareness, and encourage engagement and sales (Dwivedi et al., 2021; Tuten & Solomon, 2018).

Branding is the process of giving meaning and strength to a product or service through the creation of a unique and consistent identity; a brand functions as a promise of the functional and emotional benefits a company delivers to its customers, performing the foundation for all other marketing activities (Firmansyah, 2019; Kotler & Keller, 2016; Manullang & Syariah, 2023). Branding effectiveness reflects the extends to which branding activities successfully communicate brand's identity and core values so that they build brand awareness, interest, and a positive response from the audience (Dwivedi et al., 2021; Kotler & Keller, 2016). In the context of social media, this commonly assessed through four aspects: the visual appeal of a brand's content (attention), the clarity of the brand message (communication), the audience's interest in the brand (appeal), and the audience's response to published content (response, with success depending strongly on visual consistency, content relevant, and the strength of the message conveyed (Seo et al., 2020).

2.2. Visual Brand and Visual Identity

Visual brand is the visual representation of a brand that builds image, identity, and audience perception through nonverbal communication; elements such as logo, color, and typography convey a brand's character, values, and personality so that it is easily recognized by consumers, and a brand's function as a differentiator is expressed visually through these elements (Kotler & Keller, 2016; Wheeler & Meyerson, 2024). On Instagram, visual brand is realized through a consistent feed appearance, a coherent design and layout style, unity across uploads, and alignment between the visual elements in digital branding strengthen brand recognition and engagement, particularly on Instagram (Tentry & Haryadi, 2025; Wijaya et al., 2025).

Visual identity is overall communication of a brand realized through the consistent application of visual elements typography, color, and graphic element to create differentiation and help consumers recognize and recall a brand (Kurniansyah & Oemar, 2022; Ulita, 2023, as cited Saragih & Fikri, 2025). Visual identity can be understood as the structured system of visual element logo, color scheme, typography, and illustration or layout style that functions as the tools through which a visual brand is built and consistently presented across communication media, including Instagram (Wheeler & Meyerson, 2024). Consistent use of these elements strengthens brand recognition and recall, and builds a professional, credible impression among the audience (Kotler & Keller, 2016).

2.3. Content Strategy

Social media content strategy is the deliberate planning, creation, and distribution of content designed to attract, engage, and retain a target audience while encouraging a desired action; it must be structured systematically in line with marketing objectives, audience characteristics, and the platform used, so that content is both visually appealing and capable of driving interaction (Iskandar et al., 2025; Tuten & Solomon, 2018). Several components support this process: content planning establishes content pillars such as educational, inspirational, promotional, community building, and behind the scenes content to keep messaging focused (Harris, 2025); a content calendar schedules publication timing, frequency, and content type to maintain consistency (Tuten & Solomon, 2018); and grid planning arranges the visual composition of the Instagram feed to create a unified, professional impression that reinforces visual brand identity (Tuten & Solomon, 2018).

Copywriting shapes the captions, headlines, and calls to action that reflect a brand's voice and encourage audience interaction through storytelling (Tuten & Solomon, 2018), while consistent, meaningful message strengthens brand experience and emotional engagement (Kotler et al., 2021). Hashtags function as a classification and distribution tool that improves content discoverability and reach (Kotler et al., 2021; Tuten & Solomon, 2018), and reusable content templates help maintain visual consistency while making production more efficient (Tuten & Solomon, 2018). Brand voice, the distinctive communication style reflecting a brand's personality and values, ties these components together so that audiences can recognize and distinguish the brand from its competitors across every piece of content (Kotler et al., 2021; Tuten & Solomon, 2018).

2.4. EPIC Model

The EPIC Model, developed by Duriyanto et al. (2003) as cited in Gowandi and Maulina (2024), measures the effectiveness of marketing communication through four dimensions: empathy, which captures the audience's affective and cognitive response to content and their willingness to seek further information; persuasion, which reflects changes in belief, attitude, and behavioral intention resulting from the communication; impact, which shows a brand's ability to stand out from competitors and level of product knowledge audiences gain after exposure; and communication, which indicates how well the audience recalls and understands the message conveyed. Responses are collected using a five-point Likert scale, converted into a weighted mean per item and dimension, and combined into an overall EPIC Rate, which is then interpreted on a five-category scale ranging from Very Ineffective (1.00-1.80) to Very Effective (4.21-5.00).

2.5. Engagement Rate

Engagement rate is a qualitative metric that expresses the level of audience interaction with social media content as a percentage, typically calculated by dividing the total interactions (like, comments, shares, and saves) by the number of followers (Macready, 2026; Newberry, 2026). It is widely used alongside content quality indicators to evaluate how effectively a content strategy drives real audience response, since content marketing effectiveness depends not only on content quality but also on the engagement it generates (Koob,

2021). For Instagram, engagement rate is commonly categorized as very low (<1%), low (1-3%), good (3-6%), or very good (>6%) (Dealls, 2025).

2.6. Previous Research

Several prior action research studies inform this study. Abdussalam et al. (2025) showed that an integrated visual system strengthened brand identity consistency and audience understanding for an academic library. Iqlima et al. (2023) found that a structured Instagram marketing communication strategy increased audience interaction and broadened promotional reach for a retail business. Satriagung et al. (2025) demonstrated that a well-designed, consistent Instagram feed improved brand awareness for a finance company, while Rahmawati and Khabibah (2023) showed that Canva based Instagram feed design supported branding and increased purchase interest for a bakery MSME. These studies confirm the value of visual and content-based Instagram strategies for branding, but none of them jointly designs a visual brand and a content strategy using Affinity by Canva while evaluating the outcome through the combination of the EPIC Model and engagement rate on a culinary MSME, the gap addressed by the present study.

3. RESEARCH METHODS

3.1. Research Design

This study applies action research, following the spiral model of Kemmis and McTaggart (2007) (Yaumi, 2016), which is self-reflective and flexible enough to be adapted to practical branding problems. The research was carried out through three cycles, each consisting of four phases: planning, in which the researcher analyzes the initial condition of the Instagram account and designs the visual brand and content strategy; action, in which nine Instagram feed designs (1080x1350 px) are produced in Affinity by Canva following a chess pattern (3x3) grid, the brand's navy (#142B6F) and yellow (#FFD601) color palette, and Poppins/Lato typography; observation, in which the designs are evaluated through a questionnaire based on the EPIC Model; and reflection, in which the results are analyzed to decide whether a further cycle of revision is required. Cycles I and II involved evaluation by business, marketing, and design experts to validate design feasibility, while Cycle III involved consumer evaluation after the finalized designs were published on the official account, supported by post publication engagement rate data.

3.2. Research Sample

Respondents were selected through purposive sampling (Sugiyono, 2020), as this study does not aim to generalize to a wider population but to obtain input from individuals whose characteristics match the research needs. A total of 21 respondents were involved, consisting of 1 business owner, 2 design experts, and 2 marketing experts, who validated the design feasibility in Cycles I and II, and 16 consumers and prospective consumers of Papin Donuts, who evaluated the finalized designs and content strategy in Cycle III. All respondents assessed the same constructs using questionnaires developed from the EPIC Model, with item wording adapted to each respondent group.

3.3. Data Collection Tools and Procedure

Data were collected through observation, interviews, documentation, and questionnaires. Observation was used to examine the existing Instagram feed appearance, upload patterns, and Instagram Insight data on audience activity and demographics. Interviews were conducted with the business owner to explore the brand's history, existing visual assets, and expectations for the redesign. Documentation captured screenshots and records supporting the analysis. Questionnaires, developed from the EPIC Model (Empathy, Persuasion, Impact, Communication) using a five-point Likert scale (Sugiyono, 2020), were distributed to expert validators in Cycle I-II and to consumers in Cycle III to measure the perceived effectiveness of the visual brand and content strategy.

3.4. Data Analysis

Questionnaire responses were analyzed using simple tabulation and weighted mean formulas following Durianto et al. (2003) as cited in Gowandi and Maulina (2024). The weighted mean score per item was averaged into a dimension score, and the four-dimension scores were averaged into an overall EPIC Rate, interpreted on a five-category scale with an interval of 0.8: very ineffective (1.00-1.80), ineffective (1.81-2.60), fairly effective

(2.61-3.40), effective (3.41-4.20) and very effective (4.21-5.00). Engagement rate was calculated as total interactions (likes, comments, shares, and saves) divided by the number of followers, multiplied by 100%, and categorized as very low (<1%), low (1-3%), good (3-6%), or very good (>6%) (Dealls, 2025; Newberry, 2026).

3.5. Ethical

Informed consent was obtained from all respondents prior to data collection, and participation in the interviews and questionnaires was voluntary. Individual responses were kept anonymous and reported only in aggregate form, and all data collected from the business owner and its Instagram account were used solely for academic research purposes with the owner's consent.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings of the three action research cycles, covering the initial condition of the Papin Donuts Instagram account, the resulting visual brand and content strategy design, and their effectiveness as measured through the EPIC Model and engagement rate, followed by a discussion linking the findings to relevant theory and prior research.

4.1. Research Results

4.1.1. Company Profile and Initial Condition

Papin Donuts is a culinary MSME established in 2022 in Malang City, best known for bomboloni made with natural sourdough yeast in nine flavor variants. The business is run by six people and markets its products offline through Car Free Day events and MSME bazaars, and online through WhatsApp, Instagram, and food delivery applications. An initial audit of the @papindonuts.id account found that although the brand already owns core visual assets, a logo combining a yellow doughnut illustration with navy and black wordmark, a navy and yellow color palette, and Poppins/Lato typography, these elements were applied inconsistently across the feed, which was dominated by unplanned product photographs and bazaar documentation.

Content was uploaded spontaneously whenever a new product, promotion, or event occurred, without a content calendar or brand voice guideline, so the account functioned more as a documentation channel than a branding tool. Baseline engagement rate data collected before the intervention averaged around 3.47%, mostly in the low to good range, while Instagram Insight showed that followers are concentrated in the 25-34 age group (52.6%) and most active on Mondays, Fridays, and Saturdays between 06:00 p.m and 09:00 p.m. This insight was later used to guide the calendar.

4.1.2. Visual Brand and Content Strategy Design

The design process implemented Papin Donuts' existing visual brand, its logo, navy (#142B6F) and yellow (#FFD601) color palette, and Poppins/Lato typography, into a more consistent Instagram feed, rather than creating a new brand identity from scratch. Following the planning and action phases of each cycle, the researcher produced a wireframe and then developed nine Instagram feed designs (1080 × 1350 px). All nine designs were published on the official Papin Donuts Instagram account during Cycle III and were subsequently evaluated by consumers. The designs were created in Affinity by Canva and arranged in a 3 × 3 chess-pattern grid that alternates photographic and graphic-design posts to keep the feed dynamic while reinforcing the existing brand identity. Every design applies standardized colors, typography, logo placement, and layout, and is organized around four content pillars: product highlight, product education, value proposition, and informational content.

The content strategy component defines a content calendar of three uploads per week, Mondays, Fridays, and Saturdays between 06:00 p.m. and 09:00 p.m., aligned with the peak activity times identified in Instagram Insights, together with a brand voice guideline that specifies a cheerful, casual, and fun tone ("we do say"/"we don't say" examples) to keep captions warm and approachable without becoming overly formal or aggressive. This combination of grid planning, content pillars, a content calendar, and brand voice operationalizes the visual brand into a coherent, repeatable content system for the Papin Donuts Instagram account.

4.1.3. Effectiveness of Visual Brand and Content Strategy (EPIC Model)

Table 1 summarizes the EPIC Model scores across the three research cycles. Cycle I, evaluated by five expert validators (the business owner, two design experts, and two marketing experts), produced an overall EPIC Rate of 3.66, in the effective category, with feedback pointing to weaknesses in layout proportion, visual identity consistency, and typography. Based on this feedback, the designs were revised in Cycle II, raising the EPIC Rate to 4.26 in the very effective category. The finalized designs were then published on the official Instagram account and evaluated by 16 consumers and prospective consumers in Cycle III, yielding an overall EPIC Rate of 4.23, still in the very effective category, although the Impact and Persuasion dimensions were somewhat lower than in the expert-evaluated Cycle II. This difference may be explained by the different perspectives of the respondents. Experts assessed the designs based on technical and visual design criteria, whereas consumers evaluated them based on their actual experience of viewing and interacting with the published Instagram content. Among the four dimensions in Cycle III, Empathy obtained the highest score (4.33), followed by Communication (4.30) and Impact (4.19), while Persuasion recorded the lowest score (4.11), although still within the very effective category.

Table 1. EPIC Model Effectiveness Scores across Research Cycles

Dimension	Cycle I	Cycle II	Cycle III
Empathy	3.48	4.12	4.33
Persuasion	3.45	4.10	4.11
Impact	3.75	4.30	4.19
Communication	3.95	4.50	4.30
EPIC Rate	3.66 (Effective)	4.26 (Very Effective)	4.23 (Very Effective)

Source: Processed data (2026)

4.1.4. Engagement Rate Results

Table 2 presents the engagement rate of the nine Instagram feed posts published between 8 and 25 May 2026. Engagement data, including likes, comments, shares, and saves, were collected from Instagram Insights for the period of 8-30 May 2026 to allow sufficient time for audience interactions after all posts had been published. The engagement rate was calculated based on the total interactions relative to the account's follower count. All nine posts fall in the good-to-very-good category, with individual values ranging from 5% to 11% and an average engagement rate of 7%, categorized as very good and substantially higher than the 3.47% baseline recorded before the intervention. This increase indicates that the combined implementation of a consistent visual brand and a structured content strategy was effective in driving greater audience interaction with the Papin Donuts Instagram account.

Table 2. Engagement Rate of Published Instagram Feed Posts

Post No.	Content Type	Engagement Rate	Category
1.	Product highlight	9%	Very good
2.	Product education	6%	Good
3.	Value proposition	6%	Good
4.	Informational content	8%	Very good
5.	Product highlight	11%	Very good
6.	Product education	6%	Good
7.	Value proposition	5%	Good
8.	Informational content	6%	Good
9.	Product highlight	5%	Good
Average		7%	Very good

Source: Processed data (2026)

4.2. Discussions

The effectiveness of the visual brand is best understood by examining each EPIC Model dimension individually rather than the overall EPIC Rate alone. The Empathy dimension obtained the highest score (4.33), indicating that respondents responded positively to the visual appearance of the redesigned Instagram feed, including its color palette, typography, and layout. The Communication dimension followed closely (4.30), showing that the redesigned feed successfully conveyed Papin Donuts' intended brand message and made

the identity easy to understand. The Impact dimension also scored highly (4.19), reflecting the feed's ability to leave a strong impression and distinguish the brand from competitors. Although the Persuasion dimension recorded the lowest score among the four (4.11), it remained within the very effective category, suggesting that the redesigned feed still encouraged audience interest in and confidence toward Papin Donuts' products, even if this dimension has more room for improvement than the others. This pattern is consistent with Wheeler and Meyerson (2024), who argue that a consistent visual identity primarily strengthens recognition and perception before it fully translates into persuasive power, and is supported by Abdussalam et al. (2025) and Wijaya et al. (2025), who likewise found that consistent digital visual branding strengthens audience recall and communication more strongly than it drives persuasion on its own.

The effectiveness of the content strategy is reflected in the change in engagement rate following implementation. Based on Instagram Insights data for 8-30 May 2026, the nine published posts collectively received 197 likes, 15 comments, and 35 shares, raising the account's average engagement rate from 3.47% before implementation to 7% afterward, moving it from the good to the very good category, Dealls (2025). This increase indicates that the content pillars, content calendar, brand voice, copywriting, and hashtags applied in this study succeeded in encouraging greater audience interaction through likes, comments, and shares, not merely in making the feed more visually consistent. According to Newberry (2026), engagement rate reflects how directly an audience responds to published content, making it a suitable behavioral indicator to complement the perceptual EPIC Model scores. This finding is further supported by Drossos et al. (2023), who describe engagement as evidence that a content strategy has succeeded in capturing attention and strengthening brand presence, and is consistent with Iqlima et al. (2023) and Satriagung et al. (2025), who similarly found that structured Instagram content strategies increase audience interaction and brand awareness.

Unlike previous studies that generally evaluate visual branding or content strategy separately, this study integrated both aspects into a single action research process built around Papin Donuts' existing visual identity. The effectiveness of the visual brand was measured through the EPIC Model, while the effectiveness of the content strategy was measured through engagement rate, allowing each component to be evaluated with the metric most suited to it, a perceptual measure for the visual brand and a behavioral measure for the content strategy. Taken together, the very effective EPIC Rate of 4.23 and the very good engagement rate of 7% indicate that implementing a consistent visual brand and a structured, audience-centered content strategy side by side, within one action research cycle, provides a more comprehensive basis for evaluating and strengthening Instagram branding for culinary MSMEs than evaluating either component alone.

5. CONCLUSION

This study designed and implemented a visual brand and Instagram feed content strategy for Papin Donuts through three action-research cycles, producing nine feed designs built on a consistent navy-and-yellow color palette, Poppins/Lato typography, and a chess-pattern grid layout, together with a structured content strategy comprising content pillars, a content calendar, brand voice guidelines, and copywriting. The combined implementation achieved an overall EPIC Rate of 4.23, in the very effective category, and raised the account's average engagement rate from a baseline of 3.47% to 7%, in the very good category, indicating that consistent visual brand application and a structured, audience-centered content strategy jointly and substantially strengthen the digital branding effectiveness of a culinary MSME.

These findings carry practical implications for similar micro-enterprises. MSMEs are encouraged to use consistent visual templates, apply the same logo, color palette, and typography across all Instagram posts, organize content through content pillars and a content calendar, and schedule uploads according to audience activity identified through Instagram Insights. Reusing feed templates while maintaining consistent brand voice and copywriting can also help improve content efficiency and strengthen brand recognition over time. The gap observed between expert and consumer evaluations on the Impact and Persuasion dimensions also suggests that design intent is not always fully perceived by the audience, aspect future research could investigate further by exploring how audience characteristics and prior brand familiarity shape perception. Future studies are also encouraged to test this integrated visual brand and content strategy approach on other MSMEs and platforms, over longer implementation periods, and alongside broader branding metrics such as brand awareness and brand equity.

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